

Where can light be found?

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Preacher: Phil Martin

[0 : 00] The reading this morning comes from John chapter 8 verses 12 to 20 and can be found on 1078 of the Bibles on your seats. Again Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So the Pharisees said to him, you are bearing witness about yourself.

Your testimony is not true. Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.

You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true. For it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

In your law, it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.

[1 : 08] They said to him, therefore, where is your father? Jesus answered, you know neither me nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my father also.

These words he spoke in the treasury as he taught in the temple, but no one arrested him because his hour had not yet come. Well, it's great to be with you.

If you want to keep that open, we are going to be focusing on the first verse, verse 12.

Unfortunately, we won't have time to go all the way to verse 20, but it's not a random verse.

Verse 12 is, I think, the claim that stands at the heart of this section in John's gospel, which is chapters 7 and 8.

Arguably, the claim that stands at the heart of the whole of the gospel of John. The issue is this.

Where can light be found? This question is not a question about where can sunlight be found, though I guess for many of us stuck in the UK on holiday in August, that definitely would have been the main question we were asking.

[2 : 20] But where can light be found in a deeper and more important sense? The light that deep down we're all searching for. The light of truth. The truth.

The truth about our existence. The truth about God. The truth about eternity. But also light that has to do with life. Where can true life be found?

Life beyond death. Our great enemy. True life for a struggling and dying world. The thing is, the world is full of claimants to be this kind of light.

The list could be endless. I could stand here for hours. And then someone else could get up and stand here for another few hours. Taking us through the list of claimants to be this kind of light.

Sometimes the claimant is political. So Marxism, Leninism, back in the 1920s and 30s, proclaimed, presented itself as in exactly these terms.

[3 : 22] To be the light of the world. To offer enlightenment. Hope for humanity. I came across an amazing reference to a speech by John Ruskin. The English philosopher that he gave at Oxford University in 1870.

In which he suggested that the British, he didn't just suggest, he proclaimed that the British Empire was the light of the world. It was to be a hope for humanity. Of course, we're still searching for the political system that will eradicate the fundamental human problems of selfishness and suffering.

There are thousands of religious claimants to be the light. But which one? All of them? They contradict each other. Probably the most widespread belief in our secular culture is that modern science is the light.

It is scientific progress that can provide the truth and the only hope of a better future. This, of course, has its roots in the aptly named Enlightenment.

There's a well-known Enlightenment painting by Cochin. I can't speak French, but I think that might be how you pronounce it. And this painting depicts light coming not from heaven, as would have been the norm in Renaissance art, but coming from the human mind.

[4 : 41] It's a brilliant summary of the shift that the so-called Enlightenment brought. Where can true light be found? Well, two points today.

Number one, the claim. And number two, the call. Because it's into this context that Jesus makes this astounding, controversial, and exclusive claim, which is just as relevant today as it was when he first proclaimed it to the Jewish nation.

Just look down at verse 12 again. Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

It's no less controversial, was no less controversial then than it is now. Sometimes we think back then things were different. But we need to understand that this statement could not have been more publicly or controversially made.

The whole of chapters 7 and 8 in John's Gospel document one Jewish festival. In fact, this isn't planned, but it is their harvest festival. The Feast of Booths.

[5 : 50] Turn back to chapter 7, verse 2. Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. This is the context for the whole of these two chapters.

Verse 10, Jesus goes down to the feast. And so here in chapters 7 and 8 of John, we have, if you like, John's report. You might get a report on Glastonbury 2018.

Well, here is John's report of tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, AD 33. It is six months before Jesus died. Only John records it of the four Gospel writers.

The Jewish historian Josephus describes the Feast of Booths, or tabernacles, as, quote, the most holy of all the three major Jewish festivals, the others being Passover and Feast of Weeks.

Tabernacles was a festival of joy and feasting after the harvest has been gathered in. It's actually, I think, happening right now. In Jerusalem. The whole nation would gather and live in tents or booths, not unlike Glastonbury, except presumably not as wet.

[7 : 03] Tents to remember, of course, God's rescue out of Egypt. It was seven days of music and great food, if you can imagine. Plenty of wine. The equivalent being probably our Christmas.

The religious symbolism of the Feast focused on water and light, remembering God's supernatural provision of these things while they wandered in the desert.

And crucially, on the first day of the Feast, there was a ceremony called the Illumination of the Temple. You may have seen those great signal fires.

If you've ever seen on hills in the countryside, I think they used them to send messages quickly.

These enormous fires lit on hills. Well, four of those kind of enormous flames in Jerusalem were put on poles 60 foot high in the outer courts of the Temple.

At this illumination of the Temple, the first day of the Feast. And if you think that the Temple itself was already on a hill in Jerusalem, you can imagine how visible that would have been. Especially in a time when there was no electric lights or light pollution to distract.

[8 : 12] So that it's been said that at night, every courtyard in Jerusalem was lit up during this feast. Now, just look down with me at verse 20.

And see where Jesus speaks these words. These words he spoke in the treasury as he taught in the temple. The treasury was the same outer court.

Was in the same outer court as these vast lights. And so Jesus proclaims to Jerusalem, surrounded by these lights.

I am the light of the world. Now, I wonder, when you've heard that read, that claim before, where you think the emphasis lies.

I think the emphasis could legitimately be in three places. Number one, I am the light of the world. In other words, Jesus declares here that he did not come first as our judge, but as our saviour.

[9 : 20] He didn't come to condemn us, but to bring life. Just as the sun brings life to everything we see. And so Jesus says, I will bring true eternal life to anyone who comes to me.

Forgiveness, hope, reconciliation with God. The second emphasis could be, I am the light of the world. That is, I've not only come for the Jews, God's historic people, but for anyone and everyone who would come and follow me.

Do you think you're too bad for God? Do you think Jesus would never have you? Jesus says, no, I came for you. However badly you've stuffed up your life, come to me and you will find hope,

forgiveness, eternal life.

But in the context, I suspect that the greatest and most important emphasis is on that first word, I. I am the light of the world.

This was not a friendly situation. We might imagine Jesus saying these words to a crowd of gathered children, perhaps on a grassy hill with lambs gambling and frolicking in the background.

[10:39] You may have seen postcards with these words taken out of context. But this was a hugely controversial and subversive declaration. Right at the heart of a hostile city and a hostile nation.

You see, the Jews at this point were not warming to Jesus. Just flick back to chapter 7 verse 1. He would not go about in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

Chapter 7 verse 30. So they were seeking to arrest him. But no one laid a hand on him. And then flick right to the end of this section.

8 verse 59. What happens at the end of this conversation? They picked up stones to throw at him. But they didn't manage to because his time was not yet.

Jesus makes this statement at the heart of his own people who were hostile to him. In their temple. See, they thought their religion was their light.

[11:50] They had Moses and the law. Their hope was in keeping the law of Moses and the temple rituals. That's how they thought they were going to find life. That's how they thought they were going to find ultimate truth.

And Jesus stands up in the middle of their temple. And says, you see all this? It's all pointing to me. It's all about me.

There is no hope in your religion. No hope in your temple, your festivals. But me. I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness. But will have the light of life. Can you see that in the context how much of an exclusive, subversive claim this is?

Come to me and you will find the truth. The truth about God. The truth about yourself. The truth about eternity. Come to me and you will find eternal life.

[12:55] Now if he says this over and against the law of Moses and the temple. Which really did have a divine role to play in pointing towards him.

Well how much more therefore every other man made religion or man made light. And so I take it therefore that he stands in our temples. I am the light of the world.

It's been said many times. And some of you guys I think. Oh I know some of you work in the city. It's been said many times that the temples of the city aren't the church buildings themselves.

As many people mistakenly think. But actually the office buildings themselves. With their enormous lobbies and marble interiors. Cathedral like.

There's a firm. A law firm. I won't name it. But it has an infinity pool. Basically. In the reception. And they've had problems with people.

[13:55] Just. It's indistinguishable from the floor. So people just walk in it. And they keep socks in reception. Just in case for their clients. But these. If you walk into these buildings.

They are temples. To career and to money. Each building quietly insisting. Quietly insisting. That light and hope and life. Can be found somehow in a successful career.

Jesus stands at the heart of our city. As he stood at the heart of Jerusalem. And says. I am the light of the world. But you will not find life or hope.

In a career. Or in money. I said to the guys in the city. Imagine you could draw. A list of the richest. Most renowned city personalities of the 1980s.

The top dogs. If they could be remembered. And you were to ask the question. Where are they now? 40 years later. Most of them are dead. Most of their names are in obscurity.

[14:58] There is no lasting hope. To be found. In career or money. Don't look to it. Jesus says. Look to me. Some of us.

Perhaps might be off to university. Or perhaps I am too late. You have already gone. Parents. With children. Who have gone off to university. Think of those great libraries. Temples to academic success.

I am told that the. Cambridge University Library. Has 80 million books in it. Which would mean. You have to read. You have to read. 307 books a day. If you had a normal lifetime.

And you have to start at the age of 10. To get through it. I have a friend. Who achieves. All the academic success. That you probably could.

He had a. Got a first from Cambridge. Went on into. Academia. He is a good friend. And he said to me. A couple of years ago. Very interesting. I tried to hand him. A Christian book actually. And. And he said to me.

[15:56] Do you know. I am just fed up with reading. And he said to me. I am disillusioned with it. There is nothing there. Very interesting.

I have an uncle as well. Who works. At one of these universities. He is a well known philosopher. And. He said something similar.

To me. He is at the end of his career. Very honest. He said. I am completely disillusioned. With the whole discipline. Of philosophy. There is nothing there. Why not? Well.

Because Jesus. Is the light of the world. He is where the truth. Can be found. And he stands. At the heart of our universities. And says.

I am. The light. Of the world. This of course. All raises a question. Which is this. Who could make a claim. Like this. To stand up.

[16:51] In the middle of humanity. Amongst all of the clamoring religions. And false lights. And say. I am. Who could make that claim.

Well. Only our creator. The one who can turn water into wine. The one who can heal the dying with a word. The one who has demonstrated that life is in him.

By raising a paralyzed man. By raising Lazarus from the grave. By rising from the dead himself. Jesus Christ. God on earth. Only he could make that claim.

And then of course. By laying down his life for us. For sinners. As the lamb of God. Only he has the credentials. To say.

I. I. Am the light. Of the world. Come to me. Therefore. Jesus says. And you will find the truth. And you will find life. Everything else.

[17:50] Everything else. Is darkness. However confidently. It may claim to be the light. It's very interesting. As you read these chapters. There is no lack of confidence. And we.

We read it. Didn't we. In. In. Verse 13. The very next verse. You're not telling the truth. There's no lack of confidence. Out there. People believe strongly. That they have the light.

But Jesus says. No. Everything else. Is darkness. Well. So first. The claim. And secondly. The call. And this is where Jesus himself. Draws out the application. Of his claim. For us. The implication. If you like. Verse 12. I am the light of the world. And therefore. Whoever follows me.

Will not walk. Literally. Will never walk. In darkness. But will have the light of life. What a wonderful. Promise.

[18:49] To anyone. Who would abandon. The false lights. Of this world. And come to the Lord Jesus. And follow him. And go on following him. It's a promise.

Isn't it? But it's really a call. And so therefore. Come anyone. And follow me. Whoever. Follows me. Will never walk.

In darkness. But will have the light. Of life. The reality. Therefore. Is that we face. A choice. Jesus says. We can choose. To stay in the darkness.

My family and I. Were camping. In Norfolk. Over the holiday. It went really badly. The first time we did it. But we did try again. Went a little bit better. Anyway. We were drifting off. To sleep.

My wife and I. Drifting off. In this. Pitch dark. Tent. And my wife. Turned to me. And said. Imagine if the sun. Never rose again. And I thought.

[19:45] Thank you very much. For that. Thought. To drift off. To sleep with. But we both. Thought about it. For a minute. And it really. Is terrifying. Actually.

The idea. That we would have to spend eternity. In darkness. And yet it is Jesus' diagnosis. Of all humanity.

Without him. Do you see the assumption in verse 12? You are already in darkness. And you will always. Be in darkness. If you don't follow me.

It is a dreadful reality. That for those without Christ. They face an eternity. In which the sun. Will never rise.

Under God's judgment. Death will not be the end. And so we have an urgent choice. Jesus says. We can refuse the light of the world. The one who says.

[20 : 42] Come to me and find truth. We can resist him. We can hide away behind whatever confident sounding religion. We choose. Or we can come to Jesus Christ.

The light of the world. While we still can. And find truth. The truth. Life. Forgiveness. And if we already have. But I take it that's most of us in this room.

We can go on following. The light of the world. We'll come to a couple of implications in a second. What does it mean. That the Christian. Will have the light of life. This was a phrase.

That puzzled me. For a while. As I was. Preparing it. But I take it. It means. To come into relationship. With God forever. To know him.

In the present. To come into a relationship. With him now. And then to know where I'm going. In the future. That the path. Into eternity.

[21 : 39] Is lit up. Think of the exodus. As they followed. The light. To the promised land. And therefore. We are walking into.

An eternal sunrise. If we're Christians. Not an eternal sunset. As you sometimes see. At the end of. Disney films. We're walking into. An eternal sunrise.

Whoever follows me. Has the light of life. Someone recently. Came to Christ. From occult practices. In Limehouse. As. And. It was a wonderful. Story.

To hear her conversion. And she would say. It's like. Spiritual light. Has flooded. Every part of her life. Because she's come to know God. As our heavenly father. Light in the present.

But also. She knows where she's going. She has hope for the future. Glory. An eternal day. With the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 35] In the new creation. To be a Christian. Therefore. Is to know God. And to know where I'm going. And that is light. For the soul. And just notice.

What Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say. Follow me. And you will no longer walk. In a dark world. He says. Follow me. And you will have the light of life. As you walk through.

This dark world. Just as the Jews. Had the pillar of light. In the desert. And so the Christian. Still has to live in a dark world. For the time being. And it may be.

That you are particularly feeling. The world of suffering. And pain and frustration. At the moment. But Jesus says. That they have the light of life.

That can never be taken away from them. As we walk through. This dark world. J.C. Ryle puts it like this. The spiritual light. That Christ gives.

[23 : 33] Is independent of time or place. It is not affected. By sickness or death. But burns on forever. And cannot be quenched.

Well three implications. As we close. Number one. Joy. For the Christian. However hard life is.

You have the light of life. Jesus promises you that. And no one can ever take it away. And it means that you are walking into an eternal sunrise.

However hard life feels. You have the light of life. Number two. Don't look back. There is nothing for us. Outside of Christ.

Everything else is darkness. And number three. This means that our colleagues. And friends. Neighbours. Are not okay.

[24 : 29] They may think they are. But they are profoundly not okay. And I take it. It means therefore. That as. As Jesus. Himself.

Stood up. In this hostile. And religious. Self-confident city. Jerusalem. And proclaimed himself. As the light of the world. Well so. We therefore. In love and compassion.

The same love and compassion. That he had. For. For his people. We too. Are to give ourselves. To the work. Of proclaiming Jesus. As the light of the world. In the heart.

Of this hostile city. You guys. At the heart of Dulwich. Perhaps you feel. Dulwich. Is unreceptive. And hostile. To the gospel. Well Jerusalem.

Was too. Jesus stood up. And proclaimed himself. As the light. Of the world. Let's pray. As I close. Father. We thank you.

[25 : 27] That. We are not left. In darkness. But that Jesus. Is our wonderful. Lord. And savior. We can look to him.

And know you. And we can. Follow him. And have eternal life. We pray that you.

Protect us. From ever. Looking back. To the world. But help us. To continue. To follow. Jesus. And we pray.

As well. That you would enable us. As Christians. In this city. To proclaim. And preach. Jesus. As the only hope. As the light. Of the world. For this city.
That so desperately. Needs to hear it. And we pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[26 : 22] Amen. Amen. Imagine.